

	Type	L #	Hits	Search Text	DBs	Time Stamp
1	BRS	L1	5440	subscription	USPAT; EPO; JPO; DERWENT	2002/09/05 15:28
2	BRS	L2	827	11 and authorization	USPAT; EPO; JPO; DERWENT	2002/09/05 15:29
3	BRS	L3	74	12 and denial	USPAT; EPO; JPO; DERWENT	2002/09/05 15:29

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	Type	L #	Hits	Search Text	DBs	Time Stamp	Comments
1	BRS	L1	0	magazine and subscriprion	EPO; JPO; DERWENT	2003/05/08 14:33	
2	BRS	L2	49	(magazine or ticket) and subscription	EPO; JPO; DERWENT	2003/05/08 14:34	

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- File 15:ABI/Inform(R) 1971-2003/May 08  
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File 473:FINANCIAL TIMES ABSTRACTS 1998-2001/APR 02

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\*File 473: This file will not update after March 31, 2001.

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S1 1222701 MAGAZINE

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S5 61 S3 AND PICKUP

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35 PICK UP

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DIALOG(R)File 9:Business & Industry(R)  
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Peoples steps up marketing efforts

(Peoples Drug Mart, which reported Can\$160 mil in sales in 1999, will use marketing to bolster its performance)

Chain Drug Review, v 22, n 8, p 247+

May 01, 2000

DOCUMENT TYPE: Journal ISSN: 0164-9914 (United States)

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**ABSTRACT:** Peoples Drug Mart (Delta, British Columbia, Canada) reported Can\$160 in sales in its most recent year. It operates 44 locations. It acquired or opened 4 locations in 1999. It plans to open 4-5 units in 2000. It earns an average of \$3.8 mil in sales/store. Its average store measures 6,000 sq ft. Its locations are primarily in the mountainous regions of northern British Columbia. The focus of the company's operations is community pharmacy services. In 1999, it launched the "Peoples Pharmacy Program" in an effort to enhance awareness of that component of its operations. It also publishes a health advisory magazine called Health Report, which is linked thematically with its Web operations. The company contracts out its supply and warehousing operations.

The article elaborates on the company's operations.

**TEXT:** DELTA, British Columbia -- A certain resilience is needed to operate a business when many of its outlets are located in the rugged, mountainous terrain of northern British Columbia.

Chuck Seguin, general manager of the 44-store voluntary chain Peoples Drug Mart, had that confirmed as he made a tour of the company's northern stores in mid-January. His car was sideswiped by one of a group of three moose that loomed up unexpectedly in his path. The damage to the moose seemed slight, to the car, significant. Seguin emerged surprised but unscathed, more fortunate than drivers who, not infrequently in that region, have had a 1,500-pound animal crash through their windshield, often with fatal results.

Seguin is confident the recent incident is not an omen for the current year, which, after an excellent 1999 holiday selling season has, in its early weeks, shown signs of a more optimistic consumer mood. In 1999 Peoples saw sales move only modestly ahead. However, Seguin was pleased that, in that environment, the retailer reached its quite aggressive profitability targets. He attributes that performance to a stronger marketing effort, better inventory management and the positive effects of the recently introduced loyalty card "Peoples First."

A provincial election scheduled for later this year promises to yield a change in government. That is apparently giving consumers a psychological lift. Improved markets for British Columbia's predominantly raw material exports are reviving local industries and employment levels. Consumers are feeling more optimistic after some difficult years.

Four outlets were opened by Peoples last year, increasing its store count by that number. The company expects to add a similar number of units in the current year. Stores average 5,000 square feet, with

considerable variety around that norm. Bigger units tend to be found in suburban areas of Vancouver and Victoria.

Two of the stores acquired last year were 1,500-square-foot models located in health facilities. Seguin sees the opportunity to develop more such limited-line facilities, offering only dispensing services, over-the-counter medications and, where space permits, home health care products. Most of them will likely be located in buildings housing clinics or other health care facilities.

Not surprisingly, given the average size of the units and the nature of the markets in which the chain's outlets are located, community pharmacy services are regarded by management as the heart of the company's offerings. Last year the retailer introduced the "Peoples Pharmacy Program" to emphasize that aspect of its operations. The logo applies to its pharmacy, O-T-Cs and home health care divisions. It is used in all in-store signage, print and electronic advertising material. The logo ties in with the company's strong reliance on its Peoples private label line and the focus of those products on traditional drug store categories.

Ed Sue, appointed last year to the position of advertising and marketing manager, has been giving new leadership to Peoples' marketing efforts. He is a veteran retail marketer with diverse experience. The intention is to continue the company's already successful approach to print, radio and the web. The latter is information-oriented and is not, nor is it expected to be, geared to E-commerce.

The difficulty that would likely be caused between headquarters and the affiliated stores if the central office were to sell to consumers directly is the major reason for that self-imposed restriction.

In line with the emphasis on professional practice, Peoples has been stepping up the number of advisory clinics it offers in markets and featuring the health support services it offers in-store. Personal computer-based charting of records of critical data, such as blood pressure, has increased the level of sophistication of the retailer's patient advisory service. The chain's health advisory magazine, *Health Report*, supports Peoples' positioning as the customer's adviser on personal health management issues. It is available both on a pickup basis in the stores and, by subscription, for home delivery.

There is a tie-in between the magazine and the retailer's web site. The content of current and back issues can be viewed on the site, which also meets the needs of customers who wish to search more thoroughly for information on any particular health condition or treatment. The site's "Health Links" page accesses a selected list of general health information portals.

Another page, "Ask Your Pharmacist," features an interactive facility that allows customers to pose health-related questions on their computers and receive responses by E-mail. Other consumer-oriented sections of the web site are devoted to providing information on store locations, an updated listing of the company's Peoples brand private label products, the content of the current flyer, a listing of store locations and information on the personnel at headquarters.

The site is not entirely devoted to customer-related issues. Peoples also uses it as a reference source for pharmacists who have an interest in affiliating with the chain. Interested parties can check out the organizational arrangements, the financial commitments required and the types of support that Peoples offers its affiliated pharmacies.

For current affiliates the chain's web site offers a secure communication facility, entered by password. Through this means information on merchandising and other issues can be shared between the company and the affiliates. Seguin indicates he is impressed by the extent to which this initiative has reduced the quantity of hard-copy mail being exchanged within the group. The speed-up in reaction time and the cost savings are impressive.

That capability is in addition to, not a substitute for, Peoples' efficient consumer response ordering system. That system has been in place for some time and is well appreciated by the affiliates, according to Seguin, again because of its speed and error-reduction characteristics.

The company's actual warehousing and supply functions are contracted out. The single central supplier has until now been Unipharm Wholesale Drugs. Seguin indicates management is exploring adding one or more accredited supply organizations for the flexibility and diversity in offerings such a move is likely to bring. Negotiations are ongoing, and no decisions have yet been made.

The shortage of qualified pharmacists, which afflicts British Columbia just as it does most other regions of North America, is a handicap to the affiliates. Seguin notes that even in this small chain they could put to work 10 or more additional pharmacists immediately. The shortage has not so far had the effect of reducing the rate of expansion; most affiliates entering the Peoples' program are operating established businesses. It is, however, obliging many pharmacists to work longer days than they wish, curtailing store hours and having other undesirable effects.

The medium- to long-term solution appears to lie in persuading more well-motivated young people to contemplate a career in pharmacy as well as to open up more opportunities for professional instruction in the pharmacy schools, Seguin remarks. Those solutions will not, however, solve the current dilemma.

Seguin is a strong believer in making sure the drug chain acts as, and is seen to perform as, a good corporate citizen. Supporting charities, in Peoples' case particularly those with a social- or health-related objective, is one of the most important ways of doing that.

In its largest market, greater Vancouver, the retailer, through its annual golf tournaments, has been a longtime backer of the Vancouver Children's Hospital. It has been a major supporter of breast cancer research. It has contributed substantially to another children's charity, The Rainbow of Opportunities.

In a period when mergers and acquisitions have been relatively commonplace in the Canadian drug store industry Seguin says his company has been almost a rarity, being neither a target nor an acquirer. However, it has contrived to achieve one of the benefits that come with operating within a larger unit. It has arranged an exchange of data on operational experience with noncompeting chains of comparable size elsewhere in Canada. The benchmarks that activity provides help management detect opportunities as well as areas where a tune-up is necessary. Seguin sees the chance to continue to expand Peoples systemically, perhaps at a somewhat increased pace as its own size increases. Opportunity comes from the advantages an independent affiliate candidate can see in being able to buy better and to draw on the merchandising, marketing and other skills that only a headquarters can readily provide. In a country like Canada, where the lines of communication are stretched over such long distances, a locally based central organization has advantages. Seguin indicates he and his head office colleagues will not be shy about exploiting them.